

**FIRE SEASON
2006**

SENATOR CONRAD BURNS

WILDLAND FIRE

ASSISTANCE BOOKLET

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INTRODUCTION

Montana is facing another wildfire season. Although this spring has been filled with a refreshing amount of moisture, much will change between now and the end of the fire season this fall. I have had my staff prepare this fire packet to offer you some information on what to do prior to a fire and after a fire. There is also information on how to get assistance if you have had property damage from a wildfire and who to contact for help. Many of you have expressed interest in contracting your equipment to fight wildfires. I have included information on who to contact for offering equipment and personnel to fight wildfires. As the fire season progresses new information on programs and funding for post fire relief and recovery may develop, but the contact information contained in this booklet should get you pointed in the right direction. I hope you find this information helpful.

BEFORE THE FIRE

FIRE RESTRICTIONS AND CLOSURES IN MONTANA

The purpose of fire restrictions is to reduce the risk of human-caused fires during unusually high fire danger and/or burning conditions. Fire restrictions are inconvenient for the public, so they are implemented only after all other preventative measures have been taken.

In Montana, fire restrictions are implemented on three basic levels:

1. Federal and Tribal agencies implement restrictions that are in effect only on lands under the jurisdiction of that agency.
2. State Restriction Proclamations affect all state land and any Classified Forest Lands outside city limits.
3. Counties and Cities are responsible for proclamations that cover the remaining public and private lands within their jurisdictions.

When fire managers in an area agree that restrictions are needed, they will inform their Area Agency Administrator/Tribal Chairperson. All agencies and tribes will coordinate the restriction stages, timing of media releases, and other specifics.

Stage 1 Restrictions

The following acts are prohibited until further notice:

1. Building, maintaining, attending or using a fire or campfire except within a developed reaction site or improved site.
2. Smoking, except within an enclosed vehicle or building, a developed recreation site or while stopped in an area at least three feet in diameter that is barren or cleared of all flammable materials.

Stage II Restrictions

The following acts are prohibited until further notice:

1. Building maintaining, attending, or using a fire or campfire.
 2. Smoking, except within an enclosed vehicle or building, a developed recreation site or while stopped in an area at least three feet in diameter that is barren or cleared of all flammable materials.
 3. The following acts are prohibited from 1:00 p.m. to 1:00 a.m.:
 - a. Operating any internal combustion engine.
 - b. Welding, or operating acetylene or other torch with an open flame.
 - c. Using an explosive.
- A patrol is required for two hours after one of the above activities.
4. Operating motorized vehicles off designated road and trails.

The Process to Establish Area Closures

When fire danger/behavior threatens firefighter and public safety, the Geographic Agency Administrators can implement larger-scale area closures. These area closures may involve multiple areas and/or multiple jurisdictions. Implementation, public notification, and other specifics of these closures will occur at the local level.

Area closures covering a small area may be used when safety of the public and/or firefighters is a concern. These closures are typically warranted when there is an on-going incident and/or extreme fire conditions. The closures should be coordinated and all agencies and tribes within the area and adjacent areas should be informed. Exemptions to incident-related closures will be authorized by the Agency Administrator/Tribal Chairperson and/or the Incident Commander.

Over the years, many counties have struggled with the task of enforcing the restrictions that are implemented as a result of fire danger. These restrictions are carefully calculated and are enacted for a number of reasons. The first of these reasons is public and firefighter safety, followed by the protection of natural resources and other values. Restrictions are established through a collaborative process with all the local, State and Federal agencies having equal access and duty to ensure the public is

represented, and presented with a unified voice. The goal is to have an easily understood process that is no more cumbersome or restrictive of the public than is necessary.

Fire Restriction Information can be found by following links from any of the following websites:

http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/fire/nrgc/restrictions_index.htm

<http://gacc.nifc.gov/nrcc/>

NRCG-Northern Rockies Coordinating Group:

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/fire/nrcg>

Montana State Forester-Bob Harrington:

406-542-4200

www.dnrc.mt.gov

(The above information on closures has been supplied by the Northern Rockies Coordinating Group (NRCG) website.)

Taking Action to Protect Your Home and Property

The single best resource to prepare your residence in advance of any fire event, and steps to take during a fire, or evacuation can be found by following links on the website: www.firewise.org

Additional information on how to treat the forest vegetation around your home and private property can be found on the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation website: <http://dnrc.mt.gov> Several of the links under “Forestry” can provide detailed information. Another source can be found in the “Call Before You Cut” brochure that can be found at: www.montana.edu/wwwpb/pubs/4459.pdf

How to Go About Becoming Engaged In Wildand Firefighting Operations

Minimum Age Requirements for Hazardous Duty Assignments on Wildand Fire Management Operations on Federal Jurisdictions:

- Current Guidance in the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) Interagency Incident Business Management Handbook states that 16- and 17-year-olds may be hired and assigned only non-hazardous or non-arduous duties.
- In accordance with current federal guidance, persons under 18 years of age will not perform hazardous or arduous duties during wildland fire management operations on federal jurisdictions.
- On incidents where the state has fire protection jurisdiction (may include federal lands), states may use youth crews with persons under 18 years of age if their respective state laws allow it.
- During initial attack, the agencies are to accept each other's standards. Once jurisdiction is established, fire personnel will follow the jurisdictional standards.
- Minimum age requirements are important. If an accident occurs, the following investigations focus on whether established guidelines were properly followed. Not following guidelines can be a major liability issue.

Contract Crews:

Wildland fire management agencies have used contract hand crews for fire suppression since the 1980s. With the increase in the number of contract fire crews, States, and agencies are challenged with making the overall program as effective as possible.

- Among the challenges is developing and enforcing effective contract requirements that address language barriers, qualifications, training, work performance, and record-keeping.

- All firefighters have the right and responsibility to speak up whenever safety concerns arise. It is the agencies' responsibility to ensure contract related safety problems are immediately addressed upon their identification and notification.
- Agencies and other organizations that use contract wildland firefighters have systems in place to identify and remedy performance-based issues. On incidents, Incident Commanders and Safety Officers have the authority to pull firefighters or crews off the line if they are not performing in a safe or effective manner, regardless of crew type or affiliation.
- All wildland fire crews are made up of individuals with varying degrees of experience, qualifications, and skill. All wildland firefighting crews must perform to standards and meet standards set by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG).
- Federal agencies have the responsibility to offer annual refresher courses and safety training to agency firefighters.
- Wildland fire crew contractors are responsible for training and educating their own employees to same NWCG standards as the agencies. Contract trainers must be fully qualified as wildfire instructors and meet NWCG standards.
- The federal agencies work with State partners to make improvements in the contracting programs. For example before each western fire season begins, the federal agencies and states perform reviews of contractors.
- Agencies can authorize "negotiated competitive contracts" which give preference to the highest performing contractors.
- Several actions have been taken in recent years to improve performance of contract firefighting resources:
 1. Strengthened contract requirements.
 2. Increased inspections of equipment and reviews of documentation.
 3. Identification of consistent high-performance contractors and their crews.
 4. Penalties for violators of contract standards and guidelines.
 5. Encouragement for firefighters to report unsafe working practices.
 6. Required performance evaluations on all crews after each incident.

Who to contact:

Tim Murphy-Northern Resource Contracting Group Contractor liaison
Ph-406-829-7324, email: tmurphy@fs.fed.us.

Temporary (Summer) Employment:

Information on temporary employment with the Forest Service can be found at the following website: www.fs.fed.us/fsjobs/

Information on temporary employment with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) can be found at the following website: www.blm.gov/nhp/info/employment.html

How to Go About Getting Equipment Signed up or Contracted for Wildand Firefighting Operations

For the 2006 Fire Season the Northern Rockies Coordinating Group has instituted Best Value Contracting (BVC) requirements for water handling equipment and several other classes of equipment. This contracting procedure will replace Emergency Equipment Rental Agreements (EERA) for signing up equipment and is being used to sign up Fire fighting equipment in Region 1 of the Forest Service and Department of Natural Resources equipment. BLM and BIA equipment agreements are not covered by these new procedures.

If you do not have a best value contract you may still be able to sign up on an incident specific Emergency Equipment Rental Agreement (EERA). Typically EERA's will only be utilized when all the best value contracts have been exhausted.

Dozers, road graders, and other non-water handling equipment are not in the best value system fro 2006, but may be for 2007.

For all of the agencies most of the equipment, dozers, water tenders, fire engines etc. are signed up in the spring prior to fire season. There are a number of procedural steps to getting signed up including getting registered

as a contractor at the Central Contractor Register. Most local contracting officers for the Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management should be able to help you get started. The following webpage should have the information links needed to get started with a BVC, or EERA process:
www.fs.fed.us/r1/fire/nrcg/agree-contract/index.html

How to Get the Required Training for Contract Fire Fighting Positions

All contractors are responsible for training themselves and their personnel. A list of individuals and organizations that can provide trainers is available on the following website: www.fs.fed.us/r1/fire/nrcg/agree-contract/index.html

WHAT TO DO DURING THE FIRE

Follow the advice available on websites such as www.firewise.org.

In the case of evacuations they are the responsibility of the County Sheriff to implement. Assistance during evacuation orders can usually be found through your local Red Cross organization, or County Sheriff's office.

General information about fire activity in Northern Idaho, Montana, and North Dakota can be found by going to the website: <http://gacc.nifc.gov/nrcc/index.htm>. Then follow the Incident Information link. More timely information about evacuations and activities on local fires can typically only be found from the fire or County Sheriff.

State and Local Governments can seek FEMA funding to help with the mitigation, management and control of fires burning on public or private land. Under this process the Governor of the State submits a request of fire management assistance to the FEMA Regional Director, while the fire is still uncontrolled. If specific criteria are met FEMA can issue a Fire Management Assistance Grant Program (FMAGP) to the State. There is a

75% Federal cost share that is applied to FMAGP grants. Local governments need to contact the State Forester for assistance with and to understand all the details this program.

WHAT TO DO AFTER THE FIRE

PERSONAL RESIDENCE DAMAGE

If you have damage to your personal property as a result of a wildland fire, your first phone call should be to your local insurance carrier to find out if you have proper insurance coverage for your property, vehicles and other personal goods. Most Federal Agencies do not provide additional coverage for these types of incidents.

FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY (FEMA) ASSISTANCE

The first agency that most people think of for assistance is the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). FEMA has a role to provide financial assistance to help defray local and State government expenses of fighting fires that qualify. When a Disaster Designation has been declared by the President FEMA can also provide some assistance to individuals. The State must ask for a Presidential Disaster Designation, this is possible when all local and state resources have been committed and there remain unmet needs. The first step in seeking a presidential declaration is to conduct a thorough damage assessment at the local level. This damage assessment, conducted by local officials, provides the basis for Disaster Emergency Services (DES) to seek additional state resources and to determine if the extent of damages warrants a request from the Governor to the President for additional assistance. The justification to seek a presidential disaster declaration is made on the basis of unmet needs and the impact on the affected community(ies), not solely on the dollar amount of damages. The decision to request this declaration rests with the State of Montana.

Under a Presidential Emergency Declaration FEMA has the following programs available:

The Individuals and Households Program (IHP)*

Combined federal/state program provides assistance to individuals in disaster areas who have suffered property damage or the loss of property where such losses are not covered by insurance.

Small Business Administration Disaster Loans (SBA)*

Federally-subsidized loans are made available to replace homes, personal property, or businesses that have sustained damage and are not covered by insurance.

Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA)*

Provides unemployment benefits and reemployment assistance to individuals who have lost employment as the result of the disaster.

Legal Services*

Legal assistance may be provided to low-income individuals who may need help with insurance claims and other legal matters related to the disaster

Special Tax Considerations

An individual may deduct losses resulting from the disaster on their tax return for either the year for which the losses occurred or from the preceding year.

Crisis Counseling*

Supplemental funding is provided to the State to assist in counseling efforts for those affected by the disaster.

* These only apply after a Presidential Emergency Declaration has been declared.

If you need any information about what assistance is available from FEMA you may contact my office at (800) 344-1513, or go online to www.fema.gov

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE ASSISTANCE

Assistance can also be obtained from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). If the governor requests it, the Secretary of the USDA can grant a Secretarial Designation if certain requirements are met. If the Secretary concurs that Montana meets the criteria, producers will be able to apply to the USDA for some disaster assistance. If this designation is approved, producers could potentially receive:

Emergency Loans (EM)

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) provides emergency loans to help cover production and physical losses in counties declared as disaster areas by the President or designated by the Secretary of Agriculture. For physical losses only, the FSA Administrator may authorize EM assistance.

Other programs that could possibly be available from the USDA without the Secretarial Designation, include:

Emergency Conservation Program (ECP)

Provides emergency funds for sharing with farmers and ranchers the cost of rehabilitating eligible farmlands damaged by natural disasters. Costs are also shared for carrying out emergency water conservation measures during periods of severe drought for livestock and existing irrigation systems for orchards and vineyards.

The Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP)

Provides financial assistance to producers of uninsurable crops when low yields, losses of inventory, or prevented planting occur as a result of natural disasters.

If farmers who have purchased NAP coverage lose more than 59% of their expected yield based on 55% of the average market price of the crop or are prevented from planting on more than 35% of the area they had intended, they are eligible for FSA compensation.

Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)

Is available from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). This program provides cost-share grants for projects that improve environmental quality. Funding is currently very limited. NRCS contact for 2006 is Mr. Ron Nadwornick at 406-587-6998.

Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP)

This program can provide grants for reseeding and restoring watershed conditions. It does require a local government sponsor for the project. Funding is currently very limited. NRCS contact for 2006 is Mr. Ron Nadwornick at 406-587-6998.

If you have purchased crop insurance on covered commodities, you contact your insurance provider. Also, there may be coverage available under the Group Risk Plan (GRP) for forage crops.

To obtain further information on any of these programs available from the USDA, you may contact your county USDA Service Center, or USDA online at <http://www.usda.gov/> or you may contact my office at (406) 365-2391 or (800) 344-1513.

LOCAL ASSISTANCE

There are many sources of information and assistance available from other agencies. The first one I would recommend is your county Disaster and Emergency Services office. You may contact them locally or at:

Montana Division of Disaster & Emergency Services

1100 North Main

P.O. Box 4789

Helena, Montana 59604-4789

(406) 841-3911

(406) 444-3965 FAX

<http://www.state.mt.us/dma/des/index/shtml>

Montana State University also offers many helpful resources. They can be obtained from your County Extension Agency or online. Some of these are:

“Montana Extension Disaster Education Network” or Montana EDEN, is available at <http://www.montanahelp.org>. The Site offers links to headline news about fires, a map of current Montana fires, and tips for homeowners who live in fire-susceptible areas.

“A Citizen’s Guide to Basic Evacuation Procedures” (4448) is available on-line at <http://www.montana.edu/wwwpb/pubs/4448.html> through your local Extension office or free from MSU Extension Publications, P.O. Box 172040, Bozeman, MT 59717.

“After Wildfire” (4455) is an 80 page booklet with information for landowners. Sections include Tools to Assist in Economic Decision Making, Management Strategies for Beef Cattle, Water Quality Concerns, Tree and Forest Restoration, Reestablishing Pasture and Hay Meadows, Electric Fencing to Exclude Deer and Elk from Recovering Burned Areas, Rangeland Weed Management and Tax Implications of Farm Business Property Destroyed by Wildfire.

All chapters are available free on-line at <http://www.montana.edu/wwwpb/pubs/4455wildfire.html> or send \$6 for a paper copy to MSU Extension Publications, P.O. box 172040, Bozeman, MT 59717

I hope you have found this information helpful. If you have additional questions you can contact our local offices in Missoula (406)728-3003, Helena (406)449-5401 or Glendive (406)365-2392 or 800-344-1513. You’re invited to visit our website <http://burns.senate.gov>